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# FROM SUNLIGHT TO SHADE

ATKINS



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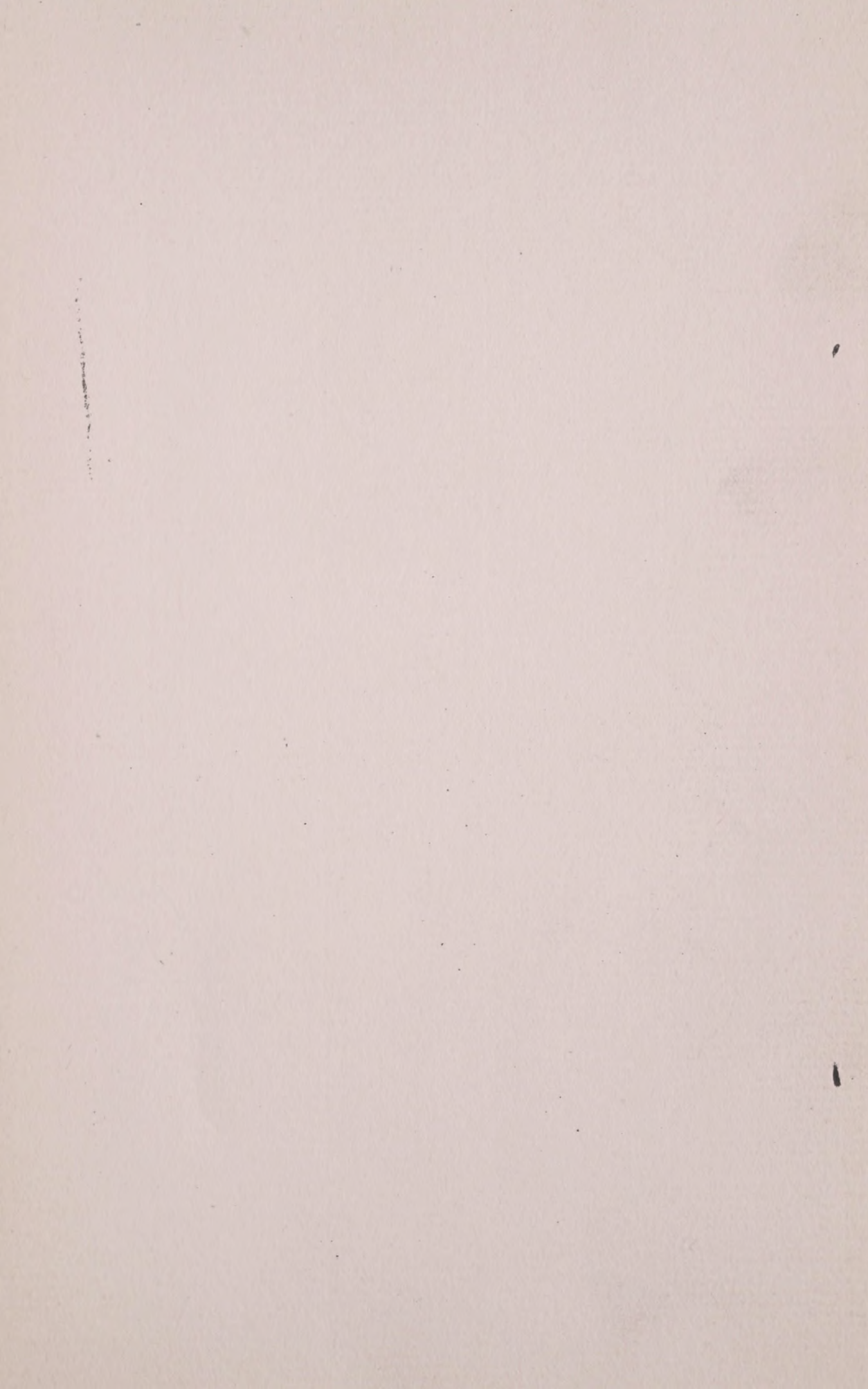
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# FROM SUNLIGHT TO SHADE

BY  
GRENVILLE ATKINS.



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# From Sunlight to Shade.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE SKEPTIC.

As flowers turn to the sun, so did Eugene Lamar and Emily Fields turn to each other, even in their early childhood. They grew up together in the quiet, beautiful little town of Greenbrier, where they attended the same school and Sunday-school and were always promoted together from one class to another.

Eugene could not remember when he had not looked upon Emily as his future wife. Of course this childish courtship was a source of amusement and admiration to the neighbors. There were those who said that the time would come when these young lovers, each married to some one then unthought of, would discuss their early attachment with merriment; others believed that they would never grow away from each other.

The two children were quite different. Eugene was always like the sunshine, bright, cheerful, sanguine, though quiet in his ways. Emily was no less amiable



than he, but it was more natural for her to fear than to hope, to doubt than to believe. Eugene's faith in the doctrines taught him in home and Sunday-school never wavered; Emily received the same instruction, but the fact that many men have many minds was a source of constant unrest to her.

"How do we know we are right?" she used to ask. Then mother or minister or friend would proceed to give what seemed to him or her incontestable proofs of the truth of the Church doctrines. But Emily was never more than half convinced, it always seemed to her just as likely that some other creed contained the truth as that her own did. The question was, How should she learn which one of the many religious bands in the world was really right? As she entered her teens, she was told that it was time for her to think of confirmation.

"But I cannot profess to believe the creed when I am not at all sure it is true," she objected. Parents, friends, the clergy, all agreed that it would really not be right to admit to the communion a person of such unsettled beliefs, but they thought it very strange that her beliefs *should* be unsettled. They held to the articles of faith without a doubt and it seemed to them as though the mere statement of said articles ought to be sufficient to insure credence.



For several years Eugene delayed his confirmation, as it was his ardent desire that the solemn rite should be administered to himself and Emily at the same time.

"I wish it could be so," she would say, "but it will be of no use for you to wait for me. I am a born doubter."

At last, both being fifteen, and Emily's views remaining as firmly unfixed as ever, Eugene reluctantly presented himself as a candidate for confirmation. The ceremony took place on a lovely summer night. The church was bright with lights and sweet with the profusion of flowers that had been gathered in honor of the occasion. But the cheer of her surroundings did not communicate itself to Emily's heart. Her spirits were weighed down by a melancholy sense of isolation. When Eugene left her to go to the chancel rail a wave of bitterness swept over her soul. How straight, how tall and manly he looked! What would she not have given to be at his side? But no; here was something which she could not share with him. It seemed so wrong that she should be a mere onlooker. She felt as though this one slight separation were the beginning of a gap which would widen between them as the years rolled by. When Eugene knelt to receive the imposition of hands, she gazed at him through tears.

The services over, Mr. and Mrs. Fields and the boy



and girl lovers left church together. The older couple walked on in advance, while the others slowly followed them, talking in gentle tones. The night was calm and bright, and the very essence of peace seemed to permeate the air, but the soothing influences of nature did not quiet the unrest of Emily's mind. There really seemed to be no good reason why she should be sad, but for all that a gloomy foreboding possessed her soul and refused to be cast off.

"I should have been perfectly happy to-night if you had only been confirmed with me," Eugene said tenderly.

"Oh! Gene, I think I should have been so too," sighed Emily. "But you have done well not to wait for me, for I know I shall never, never be confirmed."

"Oh! you would be so much happier if you could only have a firm belief, like the rest of us!"

"Oh! Gene, I know it. I can never be truly happy without believing—something—but I guess I was predestined to be unhappy, for it is evident that it was never intended I should have faith."

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Emily. God wishes us all to believe."

"Well, why have *I* never been able to do so then? I am sure I have never put obstacles in my own path. I have always wanted to be a good Churchwoman; or, at



any rate, to be able to believe *something* with all my heart and mind and soul and strength."

"Well, you may lose faith in yourself, Emily, but I shall not lose faith in you. Some day you will see how reasonable all the doctrines of the Church are, and these doubts will cease to trouble you."

There seemed to be heaven's own benediction in Eugene's smile as he parted from Emily that night, but it served only to intensify her presentiment of coming sorrow.

Not long after this Eugene began to express his intention of entering the ministry.

"The older I grow the more I feel drawn toward the life of the sanctuary," he said to Emily one day as they were walking together.

"And so you have fully made up your mind?"

"Yes, fully. I am sure that it is my duty to prepare myself for holy orders as soon as possible."

"I am so glad," exclaimed Emily, looking up with a smile of pride and love. "I would rather see you a minister than anything else; you seem just fitted to be one. How proud I shall be when I see you an ordained clergyman!"

"Are you not afraid of making me vain?" Eugene asked with that sweet smile of his that warmed the hearts of old and young alike.



"No, indeed! I do not believe any one could make you vain," was the confident response. "You never go about boasting, like most other boys; you are always modest."

"Then you would be glad to see me a minister, although you are not a Churchwoman?" He was curious to see what reply she would make. She looked up at him with a very serious face.

"Yes, indeed, Eugene! It seems to give me a little strength to see others strong. You are strong because you have faith to strengthen you. I am weak because I stand alone facing problems that I can't solve. But I rejoice that *you* can believe; I would not for worlds see you a wanderer like me. A wanderer; that is just what I am: every day I go exploring, but every night I lie down to rest without having found a clue to what I seek. You are safe in the haven of faith."

"But you are not at all sure that I am right; then how can my faith give you strength?"

"Of course I don't understand how you can be certain that you are right. A great many people of different beliefs have thought they had the truth, but you know all of them can't have had it. So I don't see that there is any more probability that you are right than there is that Luther or Wesley was. But, for all that, I like to know that other people have fixed beliefs.



They seem then like rocks to lean upon. Their feeling of certainty is infectious in a way. I do not enjoy talking with those who are like myself, for they help only to confirm me in my doubts."

At this time Emily and Eugene were attending high school together, but the next year, both having graduated, the youth made preparations for entering a theological seminary. Then came the first parting of these lovers. It was hard for both.

"Be sure to write to me every day," Eugene said earnestly. "At the best, letters are poor substitutes for the spoken words of those we love, and they cannot come often enough or be sufficiently long to make up the deficiency."

How lonely the beautiful little town seemed to Emily when Eugene had gone! Alone, she frequented those places where she and her lover had walked together ever since she could remember. And the winds seemed hushed because he was not there, the trees and shrubs moved their branches as though in mournful meditation over his departure. Yet, as she wandered thus, Emily became conscious of a sense of companionship. The spirit of Eugene Lamar seemed to hover about her, like a guardian angel. In the utter simplicity of her love she wrote him of this, and he replied that her spirit seemed ever present with him. And, what reason have



we for doubting that those two loving souls did thus hold silent communion with each other?

In the consciousness of the other's spiritual nearness each was comforted. Probably they realized the depth of their love as they had never done before.

If Emily had other admirers she was too blind to see it, and they, perceiving this blindness and its cause, withdrew their attentions in discouragement. It did not occur to Emily that any one but Eugene could care for her. She gave no thought to others, not even a feminine vanity leading her to look for admiration.

How blissful for her was the first Christmas after Eugene's going away; for then he returned, more manly, more attractive than before. She had not thought of finding him altered, and when he came toward her with a smile and words of greeting, she was speechless for a moment, in shy surprise. What a happy hour they spent late that afternoon, seated by a cheerful fire, while the shadows of coming night deepened around them! The fears and doubts that had been troubling Emily's soul retired to the background. The soft, low voice, the tender, soulful eyes of Eugene Lamar charmed them away. Perplexing questions were forgotten in the joy of the present. Ah! happy are those who can thus give themselves up to the enjoyment of the passing hour!



Others there are who can find for their souls no retreat whither care is unable to follow.

The Christmas vacation truly passed "like a dream," as novels say, and when the ensuing separation came it was to the two young people as the awakening from sleep is to one who has been immersed in the joy of some fair vision of the night, ignorant of the fact that it could last for but a brief space of time.

Now the clouds of doubt began to brood again over Emily's soul. She was wandering in search of truth, traveling the same apparently endless road over which she had toiled from her early childhood. And now her spirit was absolutely weary.

"If I could only stop thinking about religious matters and rest my poor, tired soul," she said in one of her daily letters to Eugene. "But I cannot do that, so there will never be any repose for me until my tempest-tossed bark finds its way into the haven of faith. I am afraid, however, it will never do that. There is no light ahead; all is dark."

So the weeks and months passed, yielding to Emily the happiness of love and the sorrow of doubt. All her life had these two gone hand in hand with her.

At the age of nineteen she found herself confronted by another trouble which became a second skeleton in her closet. It appeared in the shape of a dread



probability that poisoned the cup of love from which she had heretofore quaffed daily draughts of consolation. And it appeared suddenly.

One day, being in conversation with an aunt, she alluded to her obstinate skepticism, whereupon her relative said with an amused laugh:

“You will make a strange wife for a minister, Emily, if you don’t change. Think of a rectory presided over by one who does not know whether to accept the doctrines of Buddha or those of Christ!”

These careless words instilled an entirely new idea into Emily’s mind. She wondered that it had never occurred to her before. Was it likely that Eugene would marry her as she was? He had always loved her, certainly, but then, he had never considered her doubts as lasting. Besides, would not the man be governed by considerations that the boy would have ignored? She expressed her fears to no one, but brooded over them in her own heart.

All this while she gave herself to the service of the Church in every way that she could. She loved the Church, for Eugene was one of its members. It was his glory, and therefore hers, even though she doubted its doctrines.

As yet, Eugene’s mind harbored no thought of disloyalty to his childhood’s love. In his letters, and in



his conversation when at home, he continued to allude to a future in which they two should be joined, never to part. These allusions caused Emily a happiness that was alloyed by pain. She felt sure that he had never stopped to ask himself what it would be for him, as a minister, to take a skeptic for a wife. She was often strongly impelled to lay the case before him as it stood, but for a long time she could not bring herself to do it. Suppose this new view of the matter should weaken his resolve to marry her? She well knew that he would never give up his calling for her sake, and she would not for worlds have had him do so, had he been thus disposed. Entering the ministry was a matter of conscience with him, and she would rather have died than that he should sacrifice his sense of duty to marry her. If there really were a God, would He bless a union which had taken place through a disregard of the Holy Spirit's voice? Besides, she could not have so great a respect for Eugene, were he to do what he believed to be wrong through the force of her attraction for him. But she did not fear lest he offer to make such a sacrifice. She had known him all her life, and knew his integrity to be such that, once having become convinced of the duty of pursuing a certain course, he could not be turned aside. No. He would either give her up or marry her as a minister.



One day she could refrain no longer, and impulsively spoke out the thought that had been troubling her bosom so long. It was during Eugene's summer vacation. They had taken a stroll to one of the picturesque lakes included within the limits of the town, and were sitting on the shady bank with their hats off, enjoying each other's society and sweet communion with sympathetic Nature.

"Only a few months more of study in that dreary town so far away from all that is dear to me," said Eugene, looking down fondly at the girl beside him. "Then will come my ordination, and very soon after that I hope to be able to claim you as my own indeed. A little more separation, and then the happiness of being with you always."

Emily raised her head with an impetuous movement and looked up directly into those blue eyes which to her were mirrors of heaven.

"Eugene, have you ever thought of the difficulties that lie in the way of your marrying me?" she asked.

The young man had never heard her speak like this before, and he was naturally surprised. Emily, watching his countenance anxiously, saw it take on a puzzled expression. Evidently this idea was new to him.

"Difficulties?" he repeated. "I don't understand. What can ever come between you and me?"



These words sent a thrill of gladness through Emily's heart, but she knew that the ordeal was not yet over. She must explain herself.

"Eugene, how can you, when you are a minister, marry a skeptic?"

He laughed one of his soft, low, musical laughs.

"What difference should your skepticism make?"

"Did you ever know a clergyman whose wife could not believe in anything?" asked Emily.

"I believe not."

"And I guess you never heard of one, either."

"I cannot remember hearing or reading of such an instance, but you see, Emily, I am not thinking of precedents in connection with our marriage. We love each other, and that is enough."

"But have you ever thought of the consequences of such an act?" continued Emily. She was trembling with apprehension. What would be the outcome of this interview?

"I confess I never have, and I fail to see the necessity of doing so," said Eugene.

"I wish you would think of the matter now, then, for my sake, Genie. Of course, we have always talked as though it were certain that we should be husband and wife some day, but now we are both old enough to weigh well all considerations. We must not rush



blindly into matrimony just because we have been lovers all our lives. Let us see what we are doing."

"I defy you to give a single good reason why we should break our vows," said young Lamar.

"I am not saying that we should break our vows," said Emily. "What I mean is that we ought to give the subject serious thought, instead of proceeding to be married without any consideration, simply as a matter of course. Such an attitude was perfectly proper, in fact, charming, when we were children, for we could not marry then and so were running no risks; but now that we are old enough to carry our plans into execution, we ought to look into the future and see just what we may expect if we marry. In the first place, I am not a heretic exactly, because heretics do really believe in something—not a heretic, but a born, confirmed skeptic. You, on the other hand, have been a loyal Episcopalian all your life. This difference between us has not, to my knowledge, estranged us in the least—"

"Why, Emily, I couldn't love you better if you were the stanchest Churchwoman that ever lived," interrupted Eugene.

"Certainly I have no lack of interest in the Church," said Emily. "I love it with all my heart, and nothing would suit me better than to perform the duties of a rector's wife. It would not be as though I were a



scoffer or indifferent, going about my tasks in a half-hearted way. Still, willing as I am, I could not perform such duties as a rector's wife should. My lack of belief would hamper me in spite of myself. How could I comfort a poor, bewildered soul, with doubt blinding my own eyes? Besides, could you ever grow accustomed to seeing your wife kneeling in her pew all during the celebration of holy communion, instead of going to the chancel rail with the rest? And don't you know that your parishioners would be dissatisfied? I could never be popular with them. I do not speak of this because I thirst for popularity, Genie. What troubles me is the thought of the effect of my unpopularity upon you. If a minister love his wife, how can he be happy when he knows that she is a subject of ill-natured gossip with almost every person in the congregation? Of course I know that the larger proportion of clergymen's wives, no matter how devout church members they may be, are most unmercifully criticised. But if this is the fate of the average minister's wife, what must be that of that marvel of marvels, a skeptic linked in marriage with a preacher of the Gospel? Besides, dissatisfaction is contagious sometimes, and it seems to me that there is danger of the minister's coming, by slow degrees and almost unconsciously, to look upon his wife something as others do."



"I shall never accept any one's estimate of my wife, unless it exactly matches my own," said Eugene earnestly. "Never harbor such a fear, darling! The criticism of the whole world could never abate my love for you or my respect for you by a hair's breadth."

"Well, we will pass over that phase of the question. The most important consideration is yet to be named. Genie, you ought to realize that you cannot do so well the work God has called you to do, with me by your side. If we marry, I shall forever be a hindrance to you.

"You are entirely wrong! Without you I should be hampered indeed."

"Oh! Genie, you do not understand. As a minister you will be supposed to possess the power of illumining darkened souls, of convincing the skeptical, of bringing peace to the afflicted. Well, then, if you marry me you can never have much influence. People will not have faith in you. They will say, 'What is this man who goes about in the attempt to convert souls, and yet has a wife at home who is a confirmed skeptic? Why does he not convert her? If he cannot make her believe, how can he be expected to convince those whom he sees but occasionally? Then I shall have the torture of seeing that you are unjustly criticized. Unjustly, I say, for the fact that you were unable to convince your wife



would not show a lack of ability on your part, but a state of confirmed doubt on hers. I do not believe St. Paul himself could convert me. But the world is apt to be uncharitable, and you would have to suffer—and, consequently, others—all through me. Now, I do not mean to stand in the way of your doing good.”

“Then you mustn’t refuse to marry me, or you will certainly do that very thing,” said Eugene.

“Tell me truly, Genie, had you ever thought of these things before?”

“No, Emily, I had not.”

“Don’t you see that I am right?”

There was just the slightest hesitation on Eugene’s part; then he answered:—

“I feel that I need you for my helpmate, and I cannot believe that it would be right for me to give you up. God would never call upon me to root out of my heart a love that He Himself had implanted there.”

The discussion ended here, but Emily was not yet satisfied. Eugene might yet alter his mind. He had not had time to meditate upon what she had said to him. The truth is that until that hour she had not thought of her marriage with him as being an obstacle to Eugene’s success as a minister. She had realized the unpleasantness to which it would probably give rise, and it had been a question with her whether



Eugene loved her well enough to marry her in the face of such probabilities, or whether, having taken such a step, his affection would survive the tests to which it would undoubtedly be put. But during her argument with Eugene, a new view presented itself to her. She felt that however firm and devoted he might be, his power for good must be lessened by such an alliance; therefore, the plain conclusion was, that in being true to her, he must be untrue to his highest sense of duty. So it was, that between her love and her conscience, she hardly knew what to wish. The spirit of love prayed that Eugene's resolution might not fail him; conscience whispered, "Let him do his duty." She knew that she would be incomparably wretched were he to give her up; but she also felt that, under the circumstances, she could never marry him, even were he to urge her repeatedly to do so.

When Eugene went home that evening his heart was light, his mind untroubled. He had not begun to weigh Emily's words. All her objections seemed to him without good grounds. After supper, being alone with his mother, he told her what the young girl had said.

"She shows a clearness of mental vision remarkable in one so young," commented Mrs. Lamar. "I, well as I know her, must confess myself surprised that such



ideas should have entered her mind. However, I quite agree with her."

"You do?" cried Eugene, in surprise.

"Yes. Emily is a very fine girl, one whom any mother might be proud to claim as a daughter-in-law, but I have thought many times lately that she could not make you a suitable wife. If you were not called to the ministry, all would be well; as it is, I think such a marriage could not fail to result disastrously. I have not said anything, for I could not bear to mar your happiness; you have always been so fond of each other. Besides, I have been hoping that Emily would come into the Church at last; but I am now inclined to the opinion that she is right in calling herself an incurable skeptic. She has the good sense, remarkable in one so young, to see that she cannot properly discharge the duties of a rector's wife, and for that good sense I honor her all the more. My regret that you must give her up is deeper on account of it. You might search long among the faithful daughters of the Church and not find one so worthy of you as she is."

"Mother, I am very sorry to see you take sides with Emily in this matter. I hoped that you would help me to overcome her scruples," said Eugene, with a troubled face.

"I wish that I could, dear, but it is impossible, I see



so clearly that Emily is right. An unconverted wife would be a perpetual drawback to you. I know how hard it will be for you to give her up, but it is necessary that you should do so. Had she not spoken as she has done, I do not know that I could ever have had the heart to suggest such a thing. It would have seemed so cruel for you, after courting her all your life, to refuse to marry her at last. It would have seemed terrible to so disappoint her trusting love. But now, she herself has made the way clear for a breaking of vows. I have not the least doubt that her affection for you is as strong as ever, but as she has voluntarily offered to sacrifice love to duty, you can have no scruples in doing likewise. You have not even hinted at such a sacrifice on her part. She has suggested it with a knowledge of your complete loyalty to her."

Eugene lay awake for hours that night, trying to solve the problem that had come so suddenly to disturb the calm happiness of his life. He was obliged to admit to himself that there was reason in what his mother and Emily had said; still, he could not make it seem right to cast to the winds the love of a lifetime. He had always regarded intuition as a safer guide than reason, but in this case, he feared that what appeared to be an instinctive perception of duty was but the persuasion of love, in disguise. When sleep finally overpowered him,



the problem was still unsolved, and it greeted him in all its perplexity as soon as he awoke the next morning.

Eugene did not shun Emily while pondering this matter. During the few weeks that preceded his return to college, the two took their usual leisurely walks, and saw as much of each other as before. But Emily, with quick perception, discerned a change in her lover's manner. He could not conceal from her the fact that his mind was preoccupied. The young girl knew very well what produced his absent air, but she did not once again touch upon the subject with which she had dealt so plainly. This was the first trouble that they did not share together, and for that very reason it was hard to be borne.

The vacation came to a close, and the young people separated once more. Again there were letters daily received and daily answered, but alas! the correspondence was no longer quite what it had been. Eugene's missives, although full of affection, were pervaded by a certain reserve that had never before existed in them. There was no more allusions to the time when they should be married. The truth was, that Eugene's problem had reached a solution. The youth believed that he would not be justified in marrying Emily as she then was, but he could not think of contracting matrimony with any other. He would wait and hope, and, should Emily become a member of the Church, he would



then hasten to claim her as his bride. But he shrank from telling her his resolve, frankly as she had spoken to him. Emily, however, needed no statement of this from him. She knew very well that he had come to a decision; she also knew what that decision was, and the knowledge brought her mixed pain and relief.

“We shall never be more to each other than we are now,” she said to herself, “for the reason that I shall never become a churchwoman. He will not swerve from the path of right even for love’s sake, and I honor him for it. But—life will be one long disappointment to me.”

Like most of us, Emily was not sufficiently thankful for blessings already possessed.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE ZEALOUS BELIEVER.

WHILE Eugene was at the depot, waiting for the sleeper which should bear him home to all the joys of a Christmas vacation, he was accosted by a Mr. Rathbun, a family friend whom he had not seen for several years. This gentleman informed him that he and his daughter were going to spend the holidays with relatives in Greenbrier, and expected to reside there permanently. Eugene was delighted at the prospect of having their company on his way home, especially when he saw Miss Rathbun, whom, as it happened, he had never before met. She was a rather pretty girl of eighteen, tall, quiet, and happy looking. She and Eugene proved to be kindred spirits. Though so young, Miss Rathbun was already very actively engaged in religious work. While perfectly girlish in speech and manner, she was bound up, heart and mind, in the Church.

"How I wish that Emily had her unwavering faith," Eugene said to himself as he watched the bright, animated face of his new acquaintance.



Once in Greenbrier, the young student actually forgot the very existence of Miss Rathbun. His mother had kindly invited Emily to spend the day with her, so he had the pleasure of meeting at one time all those who were nearest and dearest to him. Emily had grown rather pale during the autumn, but now the roses in her cheeks revived. There was no mistaking the look of eager love in Eugene's eyes when he greeted her; and she could not fail to perceive that not for a minute that day was she absent from his mind. Even when he was talking with the members of his family, his eyes would wander to her, and always with that expression which filled her soul with the rapture of heaven.

The next morning Eugene, going out for a stroll over the crisp snow, met Miss Rathbun, and there immediately sprang up in his mind a vivid recollection of the pleasant hours he had recently spent in her company. He not only raised his hat and greeted her with a smiling "Good morning," but abandoned his course and walked by her side. She was so radiant that morning that her very presence was an inspiration. The frosty air had brightened her eyes and colored her cheeks until she looked like Hope incarnate. Not one little cloud of doubt dimmed the sunshine of the soul that shone forth in her face.

The next day was a busy one in the little church of



Greenbrier. Wreath after wreath took form under the industrious fingers of the village girls, and to the nimblest and handiest of the youths was assigned the task of hanging them. In the afternoon, the choir met to practise the Christmas music.

When Emily entered the church to perform her duties (she had been organist for a year), the bright faces of the young people, the profusion of the evergreen decorations, and the sweet smell of the pine needles seemed like messengers of faith and peace to her soul. She greeted her friends with a happy countenance, and passed on to the organ, about which were clustered the waiting singers.

The rehearsal had not progressed far when the door opened, and Eugene entered, accompanied by Miss Rathbun. A little thing, this, but enough to plunge the soul of Emily Fields beneath the waves of desolation. The odor of the pine seemed sickening to her, and the cheerful faces of the workers a mockery. She felt that the long-ago prophecy of her heart was nearing fulfilment. The rehearsal went on, but it seemed to Emily as though all the joy had departed from the jubilant Christmas songs; she heard her grief and yearning love in every line.

It was again chance that had brought about the meeting between Miss Rathbun and Eugene Lamar.



The young man had overtaken his new friend as she was on her way to the church, and he had naturally slackened his pace and walked with her the rest of the way. It did not occur to him that his conduct might pain Emily. Having reached the church, they found plenty of employment awaiting them, and engaged at once in the agreeable occupation of wreath-making. Quite naturally, too, they remained together, alternately chatting and listening to the music.

"How pretty the organist is," exclaimed Celia Rathbun. "Who is she, Mr. Lamar? I am sure I should like her."

"I will make you acquainted with her," said Eugene, who had flushed with pleasure at hearing this praise of Emily from feminine lips. "That is Miss Emily Fields, a very old friend of mine. We grew up side by side."

So it was that as soon as the rehearsal was over, Eugene hastened to introduce the two young women to each other. The meeting was one of unalloyed pleasure to Miss Rathbun, who had at once felt drawn toward one so different from herself. As for Emily, she could not look at Celia nor hear her speak without experiencing pain, yet the very fact that she was a possible rival lent her a peculiar interest in her eyes.



"I hope you will stay and join us in our work," said Celia, smiling, as she saw the other buttoning her wrap.

"Yes, you mustn't go yet, Emily," exclaimed Eugene.

"I have a headache and think I would better go home," replied Emily. She was conscious of speaking in a dull, lifeless manner.

"Oh! I'm sorry you're not well. You would have so enjoyed working among the fragrant evergreens," said Eugene, as he walked with her toward the door of the church. He accompanied her home, but did not make a call.

"I will let you rest now," he said, "and in the evening I will come to see you."

Emily watched his retreating figure through the hall window until she saw it disappear within the church. Then she turned and went upstairs to her room, choking with sobs.

"He would rather be there with her than here with me," she gasped. Off came hat and jacket, and then poor Emily flung herself face downward upon the bed, to weep out her sorrow alone.

Now she, as loving, sensitive souls are wont to do, exaggerated the meaning of a trivial thing. In reality, it was not a preference for the society of Celia Rathbun which led Eugene to leave Emily that afternoon. The latter had complained of a headache (which was, by the



way, no fictitious one) and her manner was so lifeless, so indifferent, that it seemed to him she wished to be left alone to rest. Hence his words at the door. He could see no reason, however, for avoiding the society of his fellow-beings until it was time to call upon Emily, therefore he returned to the church, to engage in a task that pleased him, and in cheerful conversation with his friends. In acting thus he did not have Miss Rathbun specially in mind, yet, once more among the evergreens, he found himself devoting the most of his attention to her. The very spirit of Christmas seemed to shine in her face and echo in her voice. When the work was over for the day, he escorted his new friend home. Yes, *friend*. He felt proud to call her thus to himself, she was so helpful, so inspiring.

But to return to Emily. Having indulged in a hearty fit of weeping, she began to be concerned about the effects of it. She was ashamed to show red eyes even to the members of her own family and assuredly she could not meet Eugene with swollen lids and husky voice, Weeping had increased her headache, and with this for a plea, she could remain in her room until morning. She was not inclined to do so, however. Eugene's vacations were all too short at best, and she could not deny herself the pleasure of even one interview with him;



therefore she labored diligently and with good success to remove the traces of lachrymose indulgence. Eugene called early, with a lover's eagerness apparent in his manner. So, for the time being, Emily forgot her fears.

Mrs. Lamar was not slow to perceive in Celia Rathbun those qualities which had won her son's admiration, and in contemplating them she often thought, "What an excellent wife she would make for a minister." It was very gratifying to her to see Eugene's interest in the young girl, and she endeavored to increase it by a word of praise now and then, always taking care to avoid the appearance of speaking with a purpose. She was not unrewarded for her pains. Gradually, even imperceptibly to himself, Eugene's thoughts were drawn more to Celia, and in the same proportion were they diverted from Emily. If any one had questioned him in regard to his feelings, and he had seen fit to answer, he would have declared unhesitatingly that he cared for Emily as much as he had ever done, and that Miss Rathbun was no more to him than a much-appreciated friend. The crisis had come, but he was unaware of it. He could not see that this new friendship was merely the beginning of his separation from Emily. As yet, although he had renounced the idea of marrying her



as she was, it had not occurred to him as a possibility that he would ever wed any one else.

His Christmas vacation was a period of alternating hope and fear to Emily. When it was over, she admitted to herself with many tears, that at no previous holiday vacation had she ever seen so little of him.

They continued, indeed, to correspond, but not only were Eugene's letters marked by an utter absence of the old allusions to their future marriage, but their tone was unmistakably less loving. Toward the close of the winter they began to grow shorter; then they failed from time to time to come daily, as they had always done before.

"He is approaching graduation, and must be unusually busy and anxious," she said to herself. But such reflections as these could not afford her consolation for long periods of time. Again and again did she find herself forced to face the unwelcome truth. Extra study and anxiety could never have produced these changes.

Much as Emily longed to see Eugene again, she dreaded to meet him, for she felt sure that she would find him altered from what he had been at their last parting. Time proved that she was right. Affectionate he still was, but not like a lover.

In less than a week after his return home, Eugene



was ordained. The little Greenbrier church was lavishly decorated for the occasion, and the congregation was so large that several were obliged to stand. They did not give a thought to the discomfort of their position, however. They would have subjected themselves to far greater inconvenience rather than miss seeing their enthusiastic young friend admitted to the diaconate. The eyes of old and young rested upon him in affectionate pride. Many of those present had held him in their arms when he was a speechless baby. He had grown up under their eyes, and their interest in him was almost parental. In all the congregation there was but one sad heart. Emily Fields, like the others, was proud of the young candidate, and glad to see him at last in what appeared to be his rightful place, but her joy was more than balanced by sorrow. She saw in all this a widening of the gulf between them. She remembered the wretchedness that had possessed her soul the night of Eugene's confirmation; but that state of mind now appeared heavenly to her in comparison with that in which she now found herself. The sorrow of six years ago had foreshadowed her present grief—yea, she reflected, and greater grief yet. The drama was not yet ended. The clouds were gathering thick and heavy about her, and the worst was still to come. Little by little she was descending the dreary slope leading to



an abyss of utter gloom. A great wave of anguish rolled over her soul when Eugene, kneeling, received the imposition of hands.

"Oh! my beloved, come back to me, come back to me, for I am all alone!" cried the desolate spirit. And when, invested with the deacon's stole, the young man rose to his feet, Emily felt the tears rush to her eyes. But pride, by a mighty effort, forced them back.

At last, the services closed, to the great relief of Emily, who hastened home to give her pent-up emotion full expression. Once in her room, she abandoned herself to a violent fit of weeping. Her sobs shook and choked and exhausted her, but she did not care. In her well-nigh hopeless grief, she wished that she could cry herself to death then and there.

"If I only had some religious belief, it would not be so hard," she exclaimed to herself. "If I could go to God and tell Him all my troubles—but how can I know that there is a God? I am so lonely; I have always been lonely! Everybody must be who is without a God. And now I am lonelier than ever, for I am deprived of the one I love. Oh! *the one I love!* That means everything to me. Oh! if I had a God, I would beg Him to take away all my possessions, my health even, if need be, rather than the love of Eugene Lamar. Eugene Lamar! First and last with me! *You* may love some



one else, but *I* never shall. You are the only God I have ever known, and now the clouds are hiding you! *Why* am I a skeptic? Why am I blind, while so many others see—or think they see? I have been in the dark all my life, and I have tried, oh! so desperately hard, to escape, but I am as fast imprisoned now as I was when I was six years old. And other people are born free, and never know anything but the clear light of faith. . . . Ought I to repine, when it was I myself who made Eugene see the unwisdom of marrying me? And ought I to be sorry now for what I said that day? No, I ought not, for I could never make a suitable wife for Eugene, while Celia Rathbun would—and will. But oh! I am human, I am not one bit divine, and the thought of seeing my Genie married to Celia is like the cold hand of death!”

Eugene Lamar was at once appointed to take charge of the Greenbrier parish during the coming six months' vacation of the rector, Rev. C. B. Lawn. So, for the present, he would remain at home, much to the delight of his relatives and friends.

During that first summer of his ministry, his friendship for Miss Rathbun thrived apace. She, with her bright faith and hope, seemed a more satisfactory companion than Emily, with her dark doubts and fears.



He realized, almost unconsciously, that Celia possessed the very qualities to make her a model wife for a clergyman.

So, little by little, influenced by his loyalty to the Church, drawn on by the sympathy which existed between himself and Miss Rathbun, he drifted away from Emily. She, meanwhile, with that pride with which womankind is endowed, endeavored to seem indifferent to this change in her lover's feelings, and acted as though the separation were due as much to her as to Eugene; but her grief soon made itself manifest in loss of flesh and color, so that all the villagers knew her sad secret. A few waxed indignant against the young minister for deserting his boyhood's love, but the majority thought that under the circumstances he had acted for the best; yet, this view of the case did not lessen in the least that majority's sympathy for poor Emily.

In October, when days were cool and nights were chill, and a certain melancholy in the air told of the year's approaching dissolution, the engagement between Eugene and Celia was announced. This was the final blow to Emily's hopes, and now her decline became rapid. Eugene was her world, her heaven, her God, and in losing him, she felt that she was losing all. As a consequence, her interest in life vanished. There was no



longer any ambition, any aspiration to feed the vital flame, and so it burnt lower each succeeding day.

"I am leaving the certain for the uncertain," she told herself. "I am leaving all that I know and all that I love, to pass out into a great, strange country. I hope that when I die, I shall die indeed; if there is a heaven, it would offer no charms to me. Existence must mean sorrow, therefore I pray that I may not exist, but lose myself and my woe in an unfathomable sea of oblivion. Only annihilation can bring me peace."

Her parents would never give up hope in Emily's recovery. They could not realize the possibility of their being visited by so great a sorrow as the death of their only daughter.

The reader naturally wonders what were the feelings of Eugene at this time. Emily's failing health was a source of great concern to him, although he now regarded the girl merely as an old and very dear friend. Strangely enough, however, it did not occur to him that he was responsible for it. Emily had congratulated him upon his engagement as a sister might have done, and she never seemed averse to discussing his future. It seemed to him that the old affection had waned equally on both sides.

Again came the holiday season, and again the little Greenbrier church was sweet with the odor of ever-



greens. One sunny day, Emily proposed going over to watch the work of decoration.

"But I am afraid you are not well enough," said Mrs. Fields.

"Oh! yes, I am. I am stronger to-day," said Emily. Her mother looked at her with a smile. Surely she appeared brighter than she had done for some time past. Perhaps the change, the smell of the evergreens, the cheerful chat of the decorators, would help her.

"Very well; let me wrap you up warmly and you may go."

As Emily slowly wended her way churchward, she thought of that day, a year ago, when Eugene entered with Celia Rathbun during the Christmas rehearsal.

"Another Christmastide, and he will have been married," she thought, with a shudder. "But I shall not be here then. Oh! if I could live. Life would be a beautiful thing to me, in spite of my doubts, if—if——. But that is all over now—the bright hope, the happy dream of the future. I have no God, no religion, no faith, and but one hope—nothingness."

When Emily pushed open the church door, the first sight that greeted her eyes was that of Eugene and Celia, engaged in wreath-making. The transient color faded from her cheeks, but as the couple looked up, the old pride-given smile rose to her lips.



"It seemed as though I should be better if I were to come and inhale this refreshing piney odor for a while," she said.

Ah! to her friends it seemed a mockery for her to talk of being better. What could a little improvement mean but a flattering phase of the disease that was surely bearing her on to the tomb? But the young folks stifled the sighs that rose from their bosoms, and spoke cheerily to her.

"How long it has been since I last touched the organ," Emily presently exclaimed. "I believe that I will try some of those Christmas hymns that I played last year."

So saying, she seated herself at the organ, and commenced to play. Alas! the notes did not swell forth loud and triumphant, as they had done a year before! The motion of the pedals was feeble and unsteady, and her fingers trembled as they touched the keys. Her voice trembled too, as she sang the dear, familiar hymns that to her were full of untrusted promises. And each one, with its burden of sweetly sad associations, robbed her of a little of her newly gained strength. She felt the sands of her life running rapidly through the glass of time; she seemed to be slaying herself with the sword of music. There was a blazing fire in the stove; it crackled and roared merrily, until the dull iron glowed. But why did the air seem to grow steadily chillier



around her? Her head felt light; the figures of the decorators looked misty. Her sorrow seemed to clutch her heart like a great heavy hand. All was trouble; there was no beam of joy anywhere. Ah! those Christmas songs of rejoicing were a mockery! Half mechanically, she turned the leaves until she reached hymn No. 348. Ah! that was better; she was so wretched, and that mournful tune was like the wail of a lost soul. She pushed in Flute and Viola, and, with only the softest stops open, began to play and sing.

*“When our heads are bowed with woe,  
When our bitter tears o’erflow,  
When we mourn the lost, the dear,  
Jesus, Son of Mary, hear!”*

Did *she* not “mourn the lost, the dear”? What a blessed privilege to give utterance to the sorrow that was crushing out her life.

*“Thou our throbbing flesh hast worn,  
Thou our mortal griefs hast borne,  
Thou hast shed the human tear;  
Jesu, Son of Mary, hear!”*

If there were a Christ, upon Him only could she call



now, when all that had made life dear to her was slipping from her grasp, and with it, life itself. She could hardly see the printed letters, and the notes were all a blur, but instinctively her fingers touched the right keys, and the words of the third verse rose spontaneously to her lips.

*“When the solemn death-bell tolls  
For our own departing souls,  
When our final doom is near,  
Jesu, Son of Mary, hear!”*

As she sang these last lines, there was something in Emily's voice that caused her hearers to look up in alarm. One glance at the swaying form and fixing eyes was enough to tell the story. Eugene gave a cry and sprang to the singer's side before any one else could reach her.

“Oh! Emily! Emily! what is the matter?” he cried, although he knew only too well that she was dying. A minute later, he had lifted her from the organ bench and laid her upon the soft aisle carpet. How quickly was that scene of gayety changed to one of mourning! The thoughtless girls who had been singing and chatting so happily but a few minutes before, now gathered, with white, troubled faces, about the spot where Emily lay, her head and shoulders supported by Eugene.



With one of the last efforts of her expiring life, the poor girl looked up into the face of her childhood's love. It was some consolation to die in his arms, even though the old affection were dead in his heart.

But *was* it dead? The young deacon did not ask himself then, but he felt, as he saw the vital flame flickering out, that no sacrifice, even that of his life, would be too great, could he by means of it fan that flame back into a steady glow. Celia Rathbun was close beside him, but he was forgetful of her very existence.

Suddenly, he remembered how troubled and full of doubts Emily's soul had always been. Could it be that no ray of light illumined her path now that she was close to the gates of death?

"Oh! Emily! for heaven's sake tell me that you believe," he cried; "tell me that you are comforted at last."

"Genie, where am I going?"

That was all; no word of faith, or even of hope, passed those death-chilled lips. Poor Emily was blind to the last. A few fluttering gasps followed those final words, and then—the bosom ceased to heave. With trembling fingers, Eugene closed the eyes that now gazed up into his with the meaningless stare of death.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE APOSTATE.

THAT Christmas was a sad one in Greenbrier, for Emily's decease had cast a gloom over every household.

Mr. Lawn returned from his vacation trip the day after the sad event. To say that he and his wife were shocked by the news that awaited them, would but feebly express the state of their feelings. When they left Greenbrier, the previous June, Emily was apparently well, and although, in their absence, they heard of her failing health, they never even dreamed that she was soon to be taken away. And they, childless couple, had loved her tenderly; they had observed, with the greatest solicitude, her spiritual troubles, and loved her more on account of them. And now that they returned home at the beautiful Christmas season, their hearts throbbing with pleasure at the thoughts of being once more in the midst of dear old friends, they were met by the news that one of that number of cherished souls had passed from the earth.

"We clergymen must needs pass through bitter or-



deals," Mr. Lawn said to his wife on the day of the funeral. "We have to read the burial service when our hearts are breaking."

Celia Rathbun mourned Emily's death with unaffected sorrow. During the one year of their acquaintance she had come to regard her as her dearest friend. Besides, had she not always been like a sister to her betrothed?

A sister! No one had ever hinted to her that, until after her coming, the two young people had been lovers. It was happy for her that her grief was not embittered by the knowledge that she had been the innocent cause of the girl's death.

These were dark days for Eugene. He fully realized now that he had really loved but once. He saw that his engagement to Celia was the result of sympathetic friendship and the apparent hopelessness of his attachment for Emily. He had come to the conclusion that the latter was not suited to be a rector's wife, and had plainly perceived that Celia was. So, little by little, and influenced by his mother unconsciously to himself he had been led on. And even now he believed that he had done right. He had loved, it was true, but unwisely; thus he reasoned. And Emily had grown indifferent. Probably she had already begun to lose her regard for him when she startled him by her argument



against their marriage. Perhaps it was her indifference that had estranged him. But oh! if it could only have been different! If the dream of years could have come to pass! Why this growing apart, and the final separation by death?

“But what right have I to complain?” he asked himself, as he paced the floor of his room, in troubled thought. “Is not all this God’s Providence? He called me to the ministry, and put my loyalty to Him to a test by demanding of me the renunciation of my dearest hopes. Then He sent me the one woman who ought to be my companion through life. And yet, minister though I am, I find it very hard to be resigned. I even find myself regretting my call to the ministry, for, had it not been for that——. Ah! what am I, that I should preach resignation to others! My own heart rebels against God’s decrees. It is so difficult for the soul to learn submission; to say at all times, ‘Thy will be done.’”

. . . . .

As soon as the holidays were over, Eugene went to take charge of the parish of Hebron, to which the bishop had appointed him. When the next Christmas-tide came he returned to Greenbrier for a brief visit, during which he and Celia were married, the Rev. C. B. Lawn officiating. There was no bridal tour, the young



couple going at once to their Hebron home. Six months later Eugene was ordained to the priesthood, the ceremony being performed in the beautiful little town that had witnessed his early baptism, his confirmation, ordination to the diaconate and marriage.

Celia was extremely popular with her husband's parishioners; she was busy, cheerful and sympathetic, and the Hebronites had the good heart and good sense to appreciate her admirable qualities, and not seek for the faults, which, being human, she undoubtedly possessed. Eugene looked upon her with pride and affection. She was the true helpmate that she had given promise of being.

But Eugene felt that something was lacking to make his life complete. He often found himself thinking that had he married Emily, and she had lived, his existence would have meant more both to himself and others. And then he would awake from these reflections to chide himself for them. Was it not God Who had altered the plan of his life, and did He not always know best? Had not the Lord sent him a far better helpmate than the one whom he had chosen in his childhood days could have been? Surely, a woman of such unbounded faith and vivid hope was a better inspiration than Emily, tormented by doubts and fears, could have proved. What consolation would she have had to offer .



in the day of trouble? Had he become despondent, she would have made him more so. This was certainly good reasoning, but when he had ceased to argue with himself thus, there would often rise before his mind's eye a picture of Emily as she looked in the days when they were lovers, and with that picture would come a swift, intuitive perception that *those* days were the best, and that in parting from Emily he had severed himself from the one true inspiration of his life. Then he would sigh, and try to find consolation in the thought that Emily's affections had been the first to wane.

All this time his wife was in utter ignorance of the relations that had once existed between her husband and her best friend. Eugene never cared to tell her the story of their early love and the circumstances which had built a wall between them.

One day, however, Celia learned the whole story. In clearing out an old trunk she discovered a package of letters tied with a blue ribbon, and, with natural curiosity, seated herself to examine them. She imagined that they were letters written to Eugene during his college days by his mother, and was rather surprised when she saw that they were from Emily, but reflected that it was quite natural for a youth to correspond with a girl whom he regarded almost as a sister. But in the course of her reading she came across several



allusions which startled her. One of them ran thus:—

“Annie’s engagement was very short; something that ours has certainly not been.”

Now, Celia was not of a jealous nature, but she was puzzled and disturbed because she had been kept in ignorance. When her husband appeared at the dinner hour, she said:

“Eugene, why have you never told me that you and Emily were once engaged?”

Young Lamar looked up in a startled manner. He realized that his silence was not exactly in his favor. He could see that Celia was not angry; there was only a grieved wonderment in her tones. He answered her question by asking another.

“How have you learned about our engagement?”

“Letters,” was the laconic reply.

“I suppose I ought to have told you long ago,” said Eugene gravely, “but I dreaded doing it. You must know the whole now, though, having learned a part. Emily and I were more than dear friends and playmates, Celia, we were lovers even when small children. I used to call her my wife as long as I can remember, and I never dreamed of a possible separation until the last year of my college life. One day, during my last summer vacation, I made, as I was wont to do, an allusion to our future marriage, and she entered into an argument



against that marriage. You know she was always a skeptic, Celia. Well, she declared that it would not be right for me, as a minister, to marry a doubter like herself. I almost laughed at her, for her objections had no weight with me. That evening I repeated to my mother what had taken place between us, and she, to my surprise, took Emily's part. She said that she herself was of the opinion that Emily could not make me such a wife as I, being a clergyman, would need. She had been hoping that Emily would unite with the Church, but had finally come to believe that she would always remain skeptical. The result of this talk with my mother was that I gave myself up to a consideration of the matter, and decided that she and Emily were right. However, I had no idea at that time of marrying any one but my childhood's love. Should she join the Church, I would wed her; if she went through life a skeptic, I would go through life a bachelor. Such was my plan. But later—I saw you—and—well, you know how it ended."

Celia was sitting with her hands clasped behind her head. Suddenly she said,

"Eugene, I think I understand now why Emily Fields fell into such a rapid decline and died. Your love for me broke her heart."



Eugene started and turned pale. If this were so, then his burden would be all the harder to bear.

"Oh! Celia, don't say that," he implored. "Don't tell me that I killed my little sweetheart!"

As he spoke, he betrayed more feeling than he was aware of doing; so much, indeed, that Celia found herself wondering whether the new love had entirely superseded the old. But she did not give expression to her thought. She had no right to cavil at his regard for the dead. He himself had evidently been unconscious of the state of his own feelings.

"Why, Celia, it was she who proposed that we should dissolve our engagement," cried the young man. "Would she have done that if she had cared for me? I have often thought that that argument of hers was but a tacit avowal of the fact that her sentiments toward me had changed."

"She realized, no doubt, that in marrying you she would be hazarding her own happiness, and besides, being a noble girl, she was unwilling to hinder you in your work by giving you a skeptical wife," said Celia; "therefore, in spite of her love, she spoke as she did. Had you remained true to her, as it was your first intention to do, I think she would have lived. But you did not; you forsook her for another and that broke her heart."



"But she never betrayed the least sorrow," cried Eugene. "She grew gradually more sisterly in manner, and when our engagement was announced, congratulated me with smiling lips and cheerful voice. Could she have done that if she had loved me still?"

Celia smiled sadly.

"You have much to learn about women," she said. "Once upon a time, a dear cousin of mine found the affections of her lover wandering off to a new object, and what did she do? Reproach him for his inconstancy? No! Try to win him back? No! She simply broke the engagement. The lover never knew the true reason for her conduct. She met him almost daily afterward; always greeted him with placid, unconcerned look; always maintained toward him a friendly bearing. But was her love for him dead? Far from it. I was her confidant. When we two were alone together, she acted herself, and I was thus witness to a slow torture that ended in death. She fell into consumption and died, leaving but one soul who knew the cause of her demise.

"Had I known of the engagement between you and Emily, her sudden death would not have surprised me. In that case, however, I should not have allowed her to die at all. I must have known that in wooing me you were deceiving yourself; you knew that she could not



make a good rector's wife, and that I would, so you drifted into the error of believing that you cared for me. I should have nipped that second love-affair in the bud, had I known what I do now."

There was but little more said then, and afterward both avoided the painful subject.

Now, remorse was added to Eugene's daily burden. He tried to think that his wife's theory was wrong, but once, during a visit to Greenbrier, he happened to overhear Mrs. Fields making a remark which proved that Celia's hypothesis was correct.

He always resorted to his religion for consolation. Time and again he eased the discomfort of his soul by arguing that "the hand of Providence" had been in all the affairs of his life. Undoubtedly Emily had suffered and died for the glory of God; undoubtedly his own course had been planned by the Master Mind above. The Lord had brought about all these afflictions for a wise purpose. But the comfort produced by these pious reflections did not long outlast the reflections themselves. Again and again he would find himself immersed in a sea of dissatisfaction, feeling that by his own foolishness he had thrown away the best that life had had to offer him, and sacrificed another human being in doing it.

How often he thought of Emily's last words: "Genie, where am I going?" They fairly haunted him at times,



and finally the pathetic question stirred within his soul an answering chord of doubt. Then more questions came, some of them the creatures of his own brain, others, the memory of certain queries that he had heard, long before, from the lips of his dead love. These last had seemed so easily answered then; Emily's skepticism had appeared so groundless. But now, to his surprise and alarm, he found himself demanding for his beliefs a better reason than the authority of the church in whose faith he had been brought up.

What a position was this for a minister! And how did he reconcile skepticism with his duties as a priest? He took pains to be non-committal in his sermons, carefully avoiding points of doctrine therein.

He did not look to Celia, that zealous Churchwoman, for sympathy in this hour of trial. A confession of the state of his mind would only have shocked and distressed her. He thought of Emily more than ever now. Had he married her, he would not have had to bear this burden alone. He became reserved, taciturn, absent-minded. His wife felt that there was a wall growing up between them; his parishoners began to remark that he had undergone some change which rendered him less successful as a pastor; they said that he was less zealous and less approachable than he had been. Some gossips hinted that he had trouble in his domestic relations, and



set about trying to find flaws in his wife's disposition. The change in the minister produced one in his people, and presently he noticed that they were different from what they had been; they were more distant, and seemed to avoid confidential talks with him. At first, he wondered at this, and one day he spoke of it to Celia.

"What can be the matter with my parishioners?" he said, as he and his wife sat at the dinner table sipping their tea. "The old cordial friendship between them and myself seems to be almost gone. Some appear timid, others suspicious."

"Perhaps they notice that you have changed," said Celia.

Eugene looked up suddenly. Could it be that his skepticism had been suspected? What had he ever said to imply that his faith in the Church doctrines was wavering?

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that you have shut yourself away from your fellow-beings; even from me," Celia answered rather sorrowfully.

He did not understand.

"I do not think I am alone very much," he said.

"Not as to the body," replied Celia; "but your spirit seems to be leading a hermit's life."

Eugene did not make any remark, and the subject



dropped. Celia had her own view of the matter. She believed that Eugene was constantly regretting that he had not married Emily.

"It would have been better had he done so," she told herself. "Her skepticism would have been no greater drawback than the dissatisfaction that his marriage with me has caused him. His awakening to the knowledge that he never really cared for me has altered him sadly, so that he is no longer what he once was. In my ignorance, what have I done? I have deprived one person of life itself, and ruined the future of another."

The reader can see that Celia also had her trouble. It was a secret one, for she never allowed Eugene to suspect that she felt their marriage to be a failure. She knew that he tried to spare her feelings by remaining silent in regard to his regrets, and she was sure that it would pain him to know that she brooded over the mistake that they had made. She had once, as the reader will remember, plainly stated that she thought his second courtship had been unwise, but she did not wish him to think that the matter continued to trouble her. Had not other young people, having made similar mistakes, been drawn together by time and circumstances? However, it did not seem likely



that she and Eugene would ever be more to each other than at the present time.

Eugene was of a very conscientious nature, and at length he found it impossible to continue the double life that he was leading. He reproached himself for not having abandoned the ministry upon first becoming skeptical.

"I have been acting the part of a coward lately," he suddenly said one day to Celia. "I have been silent when I should have spoken. I have been deceiving you and everybody else, and I can never feel self-respect again until I come out boldly and do my duty, let the consequences be what they may."

Celia looked up in alarm. What could he mean? He had a revelation to make, and probably it concerned both herself and Emily.

"In what way have you been cowardly?" she asked, with pale face.

Eugene straightened himself with the dignity of a man who is about to face suffering for right's sake.

"I have been cowardly in pretending to believe that which I doubted," he said; "in concealing the heart of a skeptic beneath the robe of a priest."

Celia slowly rose to her feet and stood gazing at him with wide, frightened eyes.

"Eugene! I don't understand you," she gasped.



“You have wondered at my unusual reserve during these past few months,” said the young man; “now you will wonder no longer. I have become a prey to doubts, as Emily Fields was all her life. In past days I thought it strange that she could not believe; now I am surprised that I could have so long accepted unquestioningly the doctrine of the Catholic Church. I see that there is so much room for doubt. And yet, rather than break your heart and incur the scorn of others, I have gone on reading the prayers and administering the rite of Holy Communion week after week, and month after month. It is no wonder that my parishioners have lost faith in me. Their hearts tell them that I am a hypocrite. But a hypocrite I can be no longer. The bishop is over at Beechcroft to-day, and I will go to him this afternoon and tell him that I can no longer fulfill my ordination vows.”

Celia stood with her hands behind her; she was pale, and there was no trace of hope in her once bright face. Finally she spoke.

“I wish I were dead. The wife of an apostate! What shame! What sorrow!”

“Celia! would you rather see me a hypocritical priest than an avowed and self-respecting skeptic?”

“Of course I do not mean that; but I shall never know another moment's happiness. Oh! Eugene! To



turn against the holy Mother Church in whose bosom you have been brought up; the church of your parents and their parents; to abandon the faith 'once delivered unto the saints'! To forsake the truth! Oh! my husband!"

"I have not forsaken the truth; I am in search of it," said Eugene.

"It is Satan who has put these dreadful doubts into your mind," said Celia.

Eugene rose with a sigh, and left the room. He had been right in believing that his wife would give him no sympathy.

He carried out his intention of calling upon the bishop. That dignitary was never so shocked in his life as when this young man, whom he had ordained to both of the lower orders, calmly and firmly announced to him that he was a skeptic. And he was more than shocked, he was wrathful. He considered that Eugene had no right to question the truth of the Church doctrines; he regarded him almost as a criminal.

Eugene bore himself with great dignity. He knew that he had nothing to be ashamed of, and so stood upright in fearless rectitude. His errand done, he rode back to his home, where he found a red-eyed, sorrowful wife waiting for him. His nature was a sympathetic one, and he loved his wife, so her distress made him



wretched. He took her in his arms and tried to soothe her, but she seemed deaf to everything but the voice of her own sorrow. Her unreasonable resentment chilled and discouraged him. Life looked darker to him than ever now. In his trouble his thoughts reverted yearningly to her who had perished for love of him. Now he understood what a cloud had rested upon even the fairest years of her life. Ah! if he had adhered to the intention of his boyhood he would have had at this trying time a companion who, though she could not have inspired him with faith or hope, would have sympathized with him to the utmost.

The news of Eugene's defection soon spread among all his friends and relatives, and produced great surprise and horror. To the good people of Greenbrier it seemed a terrible calamity that the promising youth whom they had known from the days of his boyhood, and in whose success as a minister they had gloried, should have renounced his calling and confessed to a state of utter skepticism.

"He might as well have married Emily after all," remarked one old woman to a neighbor.

"Yes; only, if he had, poor Emily would have been obliged to bear the blame of her husband's change of views," was the reply.

"I guess that is true enough," said the first. "Per-



haps it is better that she did not live to bear that blame."

Mrs. Lamar was quite broken-hearted, and her husband manifested an unforgiving spirit. He was a worldly-minded man, and had been very proud of his son, and the thought that, from being a popular minister, the latter had come to be a criticised and scorned apostate, filled him with bitter resentment.

"What will he do now?" he said to his wife. "I rather guess he didn't look before he took that leap. He was brought up for nothing but the ministry, and he won't find it very easy to get his bread, now that he has shaken his fist in the face of the Church. Well, let him starve; I'll never be guilty of advancing him a penny."

"You will never be called upon to do so," said Mrs. Lamar, with spirit. "He will speedily find some sort of occupation, and succeed, too."

"He doesn't deserve to succeed," grumbled the father.

"I beg your pardon, he does," said Mrs. Lamar. "Any one deserves to succeed who makes a sacrifice for conscience's sake."

Disappointed though the mother was, her sense of right made her her son's champion.

Shortly after leaving the ministry, Eugene settled down to the prosaic occupation of clerking in a book



store. It was a business entirely unsuited to his tastes, but at that time it seemed to be his only chance. So he bravely struggled on, putting energy and conscience into his work, but constantly hoped that an opportunity for engaging in something more congenial would present itself.

Every day some trying experience served to weaken his faith in human nature. His former parishioners, with but few exceptions, looked down upon him now, and continually showed their lack of respect in various ways.

"Hello! old man! You in here? Found your proper level, eh?" said an elderly person of the masculine gender, generally called a gentleman, as he sauntered one day into the store where Eugene was working. The tone was friendly, but the contempt was unmistakable, and the high-spirited young man flushed.

"Here I do not have to sacrifice my conscience," he replied, quietly but with flashing eyes.

These daily slights and sneers would have been less distressing to him had he found sympathy in his wife; but instead of cheering him she plainly showed that she was ashamed of him.

At last Hebron became such a hateful place to Eugene that he determined to try his fortune elsewhere.

"I must go where I am unknown," he told his wife.



"It is unbearable to be constantly meeting those who used to be friends but are such no longer."

"You are quite right," sighed Celia. "Let us bury ourselves and our shame in a place where no one knows what a fall we have had."

"Not our *shame*, Celia," corrected Eugene, somewhat sternly. "You take an utterly wrong view of the matter."

"Well, pray, when we are settled anew, never allude to your past life," begged the wife.

"I have no wish to hide my past from view. Let people take me for what I am. If they despise me because I have done an honorable thing, let them do so; the bitterness lies in being scorned by those who once were friendly," said Eugene.

"I do not deny that it was honorable for you to leave the ministry under the circumstances," said Celia. "What I deplore is that such horrid doubts ever entered your mind. Had it not been for them you would now be an honored priest in the Church."

The Lamars found their new home in Harrisburg, where Eugene secured a situation as teacher in an academy. Under the influence of pleasanter surroundings and congenial labor, his spirits revived somewhat, but he was far from being happy. His sad experiences had crushed out the enthusiasm of youth; the future



seemed to have but little to offer, and he carried about with him a depressing, aging sense of failure. His hopeful, confident boyhood seemed a long distance in the background. His face bore a careworn expression, and already showed lines traced by the chisel of trouble.

Celia, too, had altered wonderfully since the days in which she attracted Eugene by her sunny countenance and cheerful conversation. Disappointment and dissatisfaction had clouded the sunshine in her eyes and deadened the ring of hope in her voice. She was no longer the magnet she had been. Still, her zeal in religious work caused her to be generally admired by her church acquaintances. Many of these also pitied her. When questioned in regard to her husband's belief, she would answer briefly that he was skeptical, and hasten to change the subject. Then one of her friends would remark to another:

"What a pity she is so mismated! Has no sympathy from her husband in all this work to which she gives herself so devotedly."

Then it would be announced that "*Mr. Lamar himself*" had confessed to having been brought up in the Catholic faith, and the pity for his wife would deepen.

"Poor woman! So much worse for her than if he had always been an unbeliever!"

Later would come the electrifying news that Mr.



Lamar had actually been a clergyman in the Episcopal Church, only to turn skeptic at last and prove false to his vows. Then the pity for Mrs. Lamar would reach its highest pitch.

“Oh! how dreadful for her, poor woman. And she such an enthusiastic Church worker! I don’t wonder she can’t bear to mention the subject.”

But no one seemed to think that perhaps *Mr.* Lamar needed a little sympathy too.

. . . . .  
Eugene was not content to remain a skeptic, any more than Emily had been. He studied first one creed and then another, trying to find one which he could accept as being thoroughly reasonable.

“And yet,” he said to himself, “having found such a creed, I fear I should still be skeptical. Oh! for a revelation to clear away all lurking doubts and establish me in clearly-seen truth!”

After a long and weary search he was rewarded by a few glimmerings of light. He was not entirely dependent upon what he read for his views. At times an idea found in some book would impress him, and, after considering it well, he would come to adopt it as his own; but again, when he had received no outside suggestion, an opinion would form itself in his mind, and afterward he would find the same conviction



echoed in his reading. Literature was merely an aid to his growth. He was living in an age of independent thought, of broad views, and could not have escaped the influence of the times even had he never opened a book or a magazine. The first effect of his mental environment had been to break up his erroneous beliefs. This meant skepticism. The soul, alarmed at the sudden tottering of the foundation upon which it had so long and confidently rested, knew not where next to place its trust. But this was only the transition stage. Gradually new foundations succeeded the old, and the troubled soul again experienced the restfulness of faith.

But Eugene had to pursue his mental journey all alone. He tried to persuade his wife to read the views of broad-minded men, but she refused to do so, believing that broad-mindedness was induced by the devil.

"The different churches are not entirely wrong," he told her; "each has a part of the truth, and we must be gleaners, accepting that which seems good to us, and rejecting the rest. We are not to limit ourselves to what the ancient fathers knew. We are here to look forward, not backward. The voice of progress is the voice of God. In order to advance continually we must be constantly reconstructing our views."



"So you do acknowledge that there is a God?" said Celia.

"Certainly I do. My doubt of His existence was merely a stepping-stone to a better comprehension of Him."

"You have changed Him so that I do not recognize Him at all," pouted Celia.

"Is not my conception of God a more glorious one than yours?" asked Eugene.

"I don't know. I am satisfied with understanding what the Church teaches, without constructing pretty religious fables to pin my faith to," was the reply.

Eugene sighed. That was the trouble, she was satisfied. Probably she always would be.

. . . . .

A son and a daughter were born to this mismated couple. At first, their coming seemed to be a blessing to both father and mother. The love of these confiding, innocent little ones was very grateful to the starved heart of Eugene. Here were two beings, near and dear, whose affection was not mixed with dissatisfaction. As for Celia, her maternal cares occupied her mind to the partial exclusion of the great disappointment of her life. She found less time in which to lament her husband's apostasy and make him miserable.

This state of comparative peace did not last long, how-



ever. As the children grew older, Celia began to be anxious lest they should imbibe the "strange views" of their father. They were her consolation, and should they disappoint her hopes she would be wretched indeed. If Harlowe did not become a minister it would surely not be her fault, and she fondly hoped that Fannie would marry one. She commenced their religious instruction early, and sent them to Sunday-school almost as soon as they could toddle. She told them that there was "but one Church," and they, taking her words literally, supposed that the house of worship which they attended was the only one in the whole world.

One day little three-year-old Fannie, hearing her mother say that each succeeding year saw more persons in the Church, remarked, in childish wonder:

"Mamma, the church isn't large enough to hold many more. They'll have to build more on to it pretty soon, won't they?"

But Celia, engrossed in conversation with a friend, hardly heard her.

A few days later, as Fannie was out riding with her mother, her attention was attracted by a large, fine looking building surmounted by a glistening steeple. At once one little index finger went out in the direction of the imposing object, and the baby voice asked:

"Mamma, what's that?"



"That's a church, dear."

"Why, I thought you said there was only one church," exclaimed Fannie, staring up at her mother in surprise. Then Celia endeavored to make the meaning of that statement clear to the mind of the little one, but her explanation was only dimly understood.

Eugene never made the least objection to the children's being baptized and taught their catechism, but Celia was not so tolerant.

"I wish you wouldn't talk over your strange views before Harlowe and Fannie," she said one day to her husband. "They notice what you say, and I'm afraid it will make an impression upon them."

Eugene sighed, but he was careful after that to avoid expatiating upon his theories when the children were by. Celia's anxieties did not end here, however. When Harlowe and Fannie had learned to read, she began to fear lest their faith in the Church teachings be shaken by the heretical literature strewn about the house.

"I don't dare to forbid their reading this, that and the other, for you know forbidden things are the most attractive," she said to a friend. "If I don't say anything, it will be just the same, though, for they show a disposition to read any and everything. I shall



just have to look on while they do as they please. I can't lock up Eugene's books and papers."

"But if your influence over them is pretty strong, it will be an easy matter to make them believe that what they read contrary to Church doctrine is mere nonsense," said the friend.

"I hope my influence will prove strong enough for that," said Celia.

She set about in good earnest to prevent the spread of "false doctrine" in her household. By a word now and then, and an occasional meaning look, she accomplished her purpose.

"Mamma, what's a heretic?" little Harlowe asked one day, looking up from the book he was reading.

Celia saw her opportunity, and improved it.

"Well, papa is a heretic," she answered.

Harlowe's eyes widened with shocked surprise. He supposed a heretic to be a decidedly reprehensible person, and did not understand how his father could be such an individual.

"Is papa a heretic?" he asked. "What has he done to make him one?"

"Any one who believes things that are contrary to the teachings of the Church is a heretic," said Celia.

"Why doesn't papa believe in the Church?" queried Harlowe.



"I'm sure I don't know," replied Celia. "He used to, but now he thinks that such a book as that which you're reading can teach him more than the Church. He reads so much silly stuff!"

"Is this silly stuff, mamma?"

"Yes, dear, that's all it is. It is just what some foolish man has imagined about God."

Thus taught by the mother, these children gradually lost respect for their father, and thus ceased to show it. To Celia's delight, they gave up exploring his heretical reading matter, feeling that it was beneath their notice. One day a little girl who was spending the afternoon at the Lamar house picked up a book that she found on the sitting-room sofa, and opened it, asking what it was. Harlowe looked over her shoulder at the title, and then said, with an impatient toss of the head:

"Oh! that doesn't amount to anything. That's just one of papa's books!"

Papa, sitting in the study beyond, heard this and sighed sadly. "Would a child of Emily's ever have spoken thus?" he asked himself.

"Poor Emily! Had I married her we might have grown into the truth together," he soliloquized, as he sat with his head in his hands. "In any case she would not have despised me."



Yes, he had made a mistake, and was realizing it more and more. It was true, he could not call his life a failure; he was growing in mental stature; he was sowing his golden thoughts broadcast through the land; he was rousing other minds to activity; kindred spirits were finding him out; he already had a circle of sympathetic friends: but in his face could be seen a soul-hunger that seemed destined never to be satisfied in this world, the hunger for sympathy at home. With a loving, helpful wife, and children combining respect with affection, he could have easily dispensed with outside sympathizers; but his little knot of congenial associates could not compensate him for the lack of domestic harmony.

Of what might he not have been capable under different circumstances?

**THE END.**

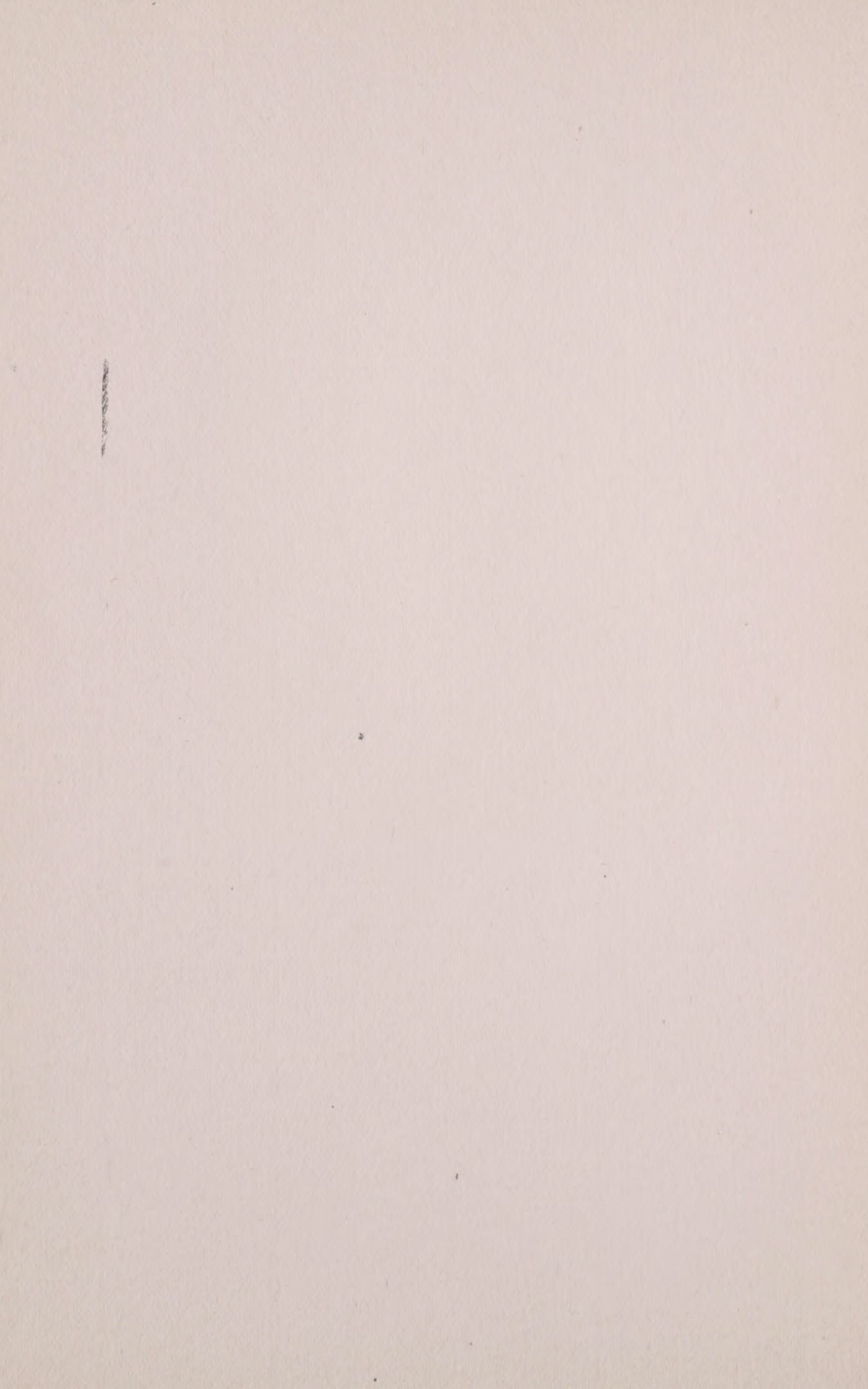












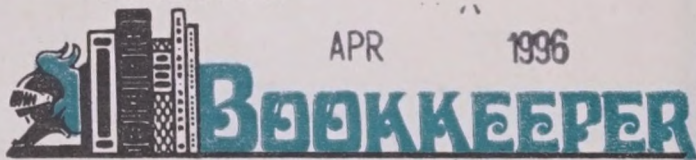






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